

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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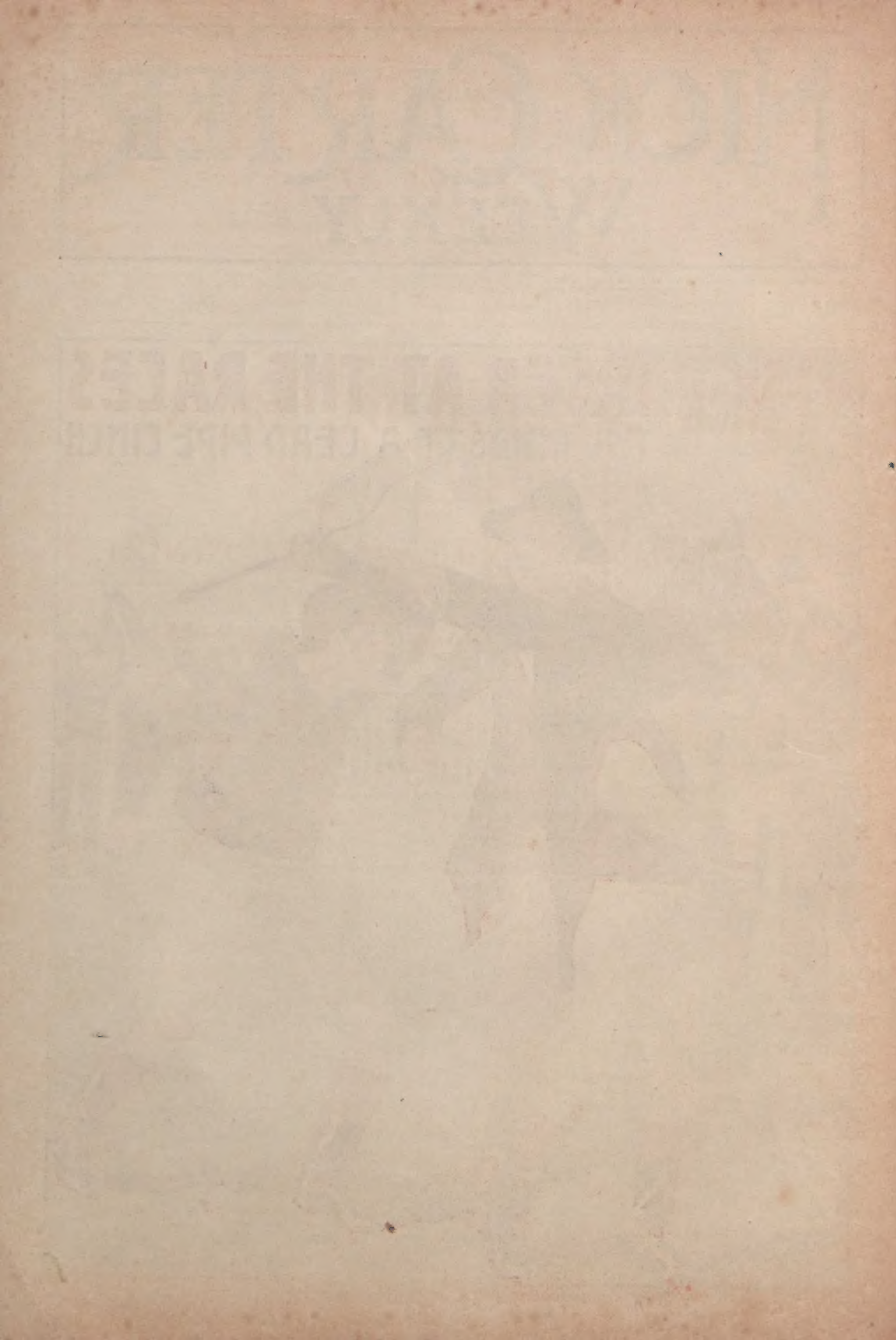
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NICK CARTER AT THE RACES OR TWO KINDS OF A LEAD PIPE CINCH



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
NICK CARTER

PETE STOPPED AS IF HE HAD BEEN STRUCK, HIS UPRAISED WHIP SUSPENDED IN THE AIR.



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Nick Carter at the Races; OR, TWO KINDS OF A LEAD PIPE CINCH.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HAMLET.

"Well, Nick, I wonder what is on the slate for us next?" remarked the great detective's chief assistant, Chick, one August night, as the two sat smoking in Nick Carter's cool study.

They had just rounded up one of their many successful cases, and were about to congratulate themselves that for once in a long time they had a chance for a breathing spell of a day or two at least.

"I don't know, Chick, of course, what may turn up next on our slate or how soon it may come," was Nick's reply; "but of this I am positive it's got to be something of considerable importance if I touch it."

"Eh?" exclaimed the assistant, questioningly.

"Well, you know we've had hard work and a great deal of it this summer, and I'm thinking seriously of leaving duty behind and run-

ning away to the country for a week or two." said Nick.

"Well, you go. Patsy and I——"

"Not much. If I go, you and Patsy go also. You've both worked as hard as I, and need a short vacation, too. It will do us all good to get a few breaths of country air."

"I'd be delighted."

"Then we'll skin out early in the morning, and let us hope that business will not follow us, as it always has heretofore."

"Good ! I hope nothing will offer itself for your services to-night."

"Oh, I'll not look at anything, except it be a case involving life or death," declared the great detective.

"Or a poor man's happiness," laughed Chick, by way of supplement. "I know you, I guess, Nick, and I'd hate to risk my chance of the country on the application of any one with a pitiful tale of some trivial loss which he wants righted."

"I tell you, lad," said Nick, earnestly, "nothing less than—— Come in."

A knock on the door interrupted Nick's speech.

John, the faithful butler, appeared in the doorway.

"A person to see you, sir," he announced.

"What kind of a person, John?"

"Middle-aged man, sir. Looks troubled."

"Oh, they always look troubled when they come to see me," sighed Nick. "You may send him up here, John, till we find out what causes that look of trouble."

"Told you so," smiled Chick. "I guess that breathing spell has vanished before it reached us."

"We'll see about that. Didn't I say that nothing short of—— Here he is."

A man with gray "Greeley" whiskers on his face, dressed in unmistakable farm costume, and probably fifty years of age, stood in the doorway, where he had halted in hesitation.

"Come in, sir, and have a seat," invited Nick, in his cheery voice.

The stranger complied.

"Well, sir?" encouraged Nick, as the visitor hesitated.

"Are you Nick Carter?"

"Yes."

The man looked at Chick without saying anything, but the look expressed caution.

"This is my principal assistant, from whom I keep no secrets," assured Nick, in reply to the look. "Speak right out. I presume you desire our professional services."

"I do, sir."

"What is your case?"

"I've had a horse stolen, and I want you to find him for me."

"We never bother with affairs of that kind, sir," said Nick. "I'm sorry, but——"

"I'll pay you well for your time and trouble," anxiously interrupted the man. "You shall not complain on that score."

"But, my dear sir, how can you pay me well when it is only an affair of a horse?"

The man looked around with a sort of quick, searching glance before he made reply in a modulated tone of voice:

"Some horses are more valuable than others. A horse sometimes is worth a small fortune to his owner."

"Come right out with it, my man."

"Well, there was Domino, who last year won nearly two hundred thousand dollars for his owner."

Nick straightened up from his lounging attitude at these words, and the quizzical smile faded from Chick's face.

"But this horse is not Domino? You are not Mr. Keene, his owner?"

"No, sir. The horse is not Domino, but he is to me what Domino was to Mr. Keene two years ago," came the strange reply.

"A racer, eh?"

"Yes; the stolen horse was to have retrieved my fortunes, and unless I recover him in time, I shall be utterly ruined."

"Explain fully," urged Nick, now all attention.

"I raised him from a colt out on my farm, and have been training him on a private track which I have there. His speed and staying powers have developed into something phenomenal."

"I was planning to get him into his best stride and to enter him at the Gravesend track in September in a class he would be sure to beat."

"Intended to 'burn up the ring' with him, eh?"

"Well, hardly that, sir. I couldn't raise enough money to do much betting, you see, but what betting I would get on the race would be at large odds, and very little risk."

"A sort of 'lead pipe cinch,' as they say at the racetrack," interjected Nick.

"That's it, sir. The money thus won, to—

gether with the purse and other purses I expected him to take, would have pulled me out of financial embarrassment, to say nothing of the price I could have got for the animal at the close of the meeting."

"You speak of the horse in great confidence."

"Oh, there is no mistake about that. He is a wonder of his kind."

"And you say unless you can recover the horse you will be ruined?"

The man's voice choked as he replied:

"That is true. My farm is heavily mortgaged—for more than it would bring under an enforced sale—and unless I have the money on November 1st—five thousand dollars—I will be little better than a beggar."

A sob escaped the farmer's lips, and he paused long enough to master his emotions. Then he went on:

"I wouldn't care so much for myself, for I'm not a young man, and have been used to hard knocks, but for Lizzie's sake I'd about as soon die."

"Who is Lizzie?"

"My daughter—all I have on earth to live for, since her mother died. I've tried to do my duty by the girl, and in order to educate her and give her the best in the land I've run dangerously close to bankruptcy. Unless I can recover that horse, life for me and Lizzie will have a very dark future."

"What is your name?"

"John Barry."

"Where do you live?"

"Forty miles back in New Jersey."

Nick rose slowly to his feet as he said:

"Mr. Barry, there is no need to borrow trouble for the future. You shall pay off those mortgages on November 1st, unless Nick Carter is a bungler in his business."

The farmer sprang to his feet precipitously.

"Then you'll take the case?"

"Yes."

"Thank you, sir, a thousand times. Shall I tell you the particulars—give you the points?"

"Not now. Not here. Go to your New Jersey home. Some time to-morrow I will visit you there and get whatever information in the case may be of aid to me in the search."

Nick took Barry's address, and after some further unimportant conversation the farmer took his departure, bearing with him a lighter heart than he had carried in his bosom for several days.

As the street door closed behind him, Chick, with a comical grin on his face, met Nick's imperturbable stare, and said:

"What did I say a little while ago. Nothing but a case of life and death, eh? And here we have it. Nothing but a case of a stolen horse."

"My boy," came the evenly-spoken response, "that stolen horse may stand for life and death, who knows? With a man like Barry, life without money wherewith to make his worshipful daughter happy would mean death."

"I see you'll get around it some way. Well," with a stage sigh, "thus passes our vacation in the country."

"Hold on!" cried Nick. "I'm not so sure but that the country recreation begins right with this case."

"How so?"

"Just wait and see," was the response, as the great detective "winked the other eye."

CHAPTER II.

INTRODUCING UNCLE SILAS WEED.

When Nick Carter, true to his promise, appeared at John Barry's farm next day, Chick was with him. They were warmly welcomed by the farmer, and seated upon the wide, cool breezy porch, Nick proceeded at once to put himself in possession of his facts.

"What was the name of your horse, Mr. Barry?"

"Hamlet."

"How old is he?"

"Three years."

"You trained him here on your farm?"

"Yes. I have a mile track laid out back of my barn around three large fields."

"What time did Hamlet make on your track?"

"The best was a mile in 1.41¾. He has done it time after time in 1.42."

"How much weight had he up?"

"One hundred and ten pounds?"

"Who rode him?"

The farmer hesitated in his answer for the first time.

"I suppose I might as well tell you," he said at last with a show of confusion.

"I'd advise you to be perfectly frank with me."

"Well, Lizzie was the mount."

"Your daughter?"

"Yes. She is a splendid horsewoman."

"Who was present when your trials were made?"

"No one but she and I. You don't suppose I'd let any outsider into that secret."

"And you told no one of this horse's speed?"

"I certainly did not."

"And Lizzie?"

"Oh, I cautioned her against speaking about it to any one."

"She knows what you designed doing with the horse?"

"In part, yes."

"When was the horse stolen?"

"A week ago to-night."

"Describe him."

"He was a chestnut, with two white feet; one on the near front, and the other on the off hind leg.

"There was also a white star on his forehead."

"A fine-looking horse?"

"No, sir. Nobody would suspect he was a valuable animal unless he was thoroughly versed in fast horseflesh of the running kind."

"Mr. Barry, somebody besides you and your daughter knows all about Hamlet's abilities on the track."

"I fear so, but how they learned it I don't understand. Surely they didn't learn it from observation nor from me."

"Then your daughter?"

"Lizzie declares she told no one."

"Well, I'm convinced that the horse was stolen for a purpose by some person or persons who know his speed and intend to use it for their own benefit. Mr. Barry, may I see your daughter Lizzie?"

"Why, certainly. I'll call her."

"Stop! First, I want your consent to put the whole case before her as clearly as it has been put before me."

"If you deem it best, I've no objections."

Lizzie Barry was summoned before the detectives.

At first glance Nick ceased to wonder at the farmer's great interest in his only child.

Miss Barry was a beautiful girl, who bore the manners and appearance of a well-bred, intelligent young woman.

She was introduced to the two detectives, and greeted them with an easy grace which completely charmed both.

Nick proceeded at once to put her into possession of all the facts of the case on which he had been employed by her father.

"Now, Miss Barry," he concluded, "you will see the importance of entire candor with me right from the start. Information has in some way got out about Hamlet's abilities. Can you think of any possible way for it to escape?"

Lizzie hesitated the least bit, and to Nick's

practiced eye it was plain she had something on her mind.

"I was sincere," she said at last, "when I told papa that the secret could not possibly have gotten out through me. But I cannot truthfully say that I did not impart it to a living soul."

She met her father's surprised look with one of loving frankness, and continued:

"I am as positive as I am of my existence that the one to whom I confided our secret has not betrayed it."

"Who is this person?"

She let her eyes fall before her father's stare, and a rosy blush suffused her face.

"His name is Mansfield—Parke Mansfield."

"A lover," was the thought which at the same time shot through the minds of Nick and Chick.

John Barry simply scowled, looked hurt, and said nothing.

"Why did you put such great trust in Mr. Mansfield, may I ask, Miss Barry?"

She drew up her slight, well-rounded form and flashed Nick a look of pride as she replied:

"Because he is one from whom I refuse to have any secrets."

"Your intended future husband?"

"Yes."

"But there was some other motive than extreme trust behind it," urged Nick.

"I admit it."

"Do you mind telling me?"

"No; not since papa has told you so much about his personal affairs," was the firm response. "Mr. Mansfield knows our serious financial straits. He is himself a man without many resources, and our future happiness and arrangements, to some extent, depend upon the outcome of the races with Hamlet."

"I see," nodded Nick. "Does Mr. Mansfield live near here?"

"Oh, no, sir. Several hundred miles away, in a place called Charleston."

"How did you meet him?"

"I went to school there. Only got home in May."

"Then you wrote the information?"

"Certainly."

"Is Mr. Mansfield interested in race-horses?"

"Only in a local sense, I believe. He is secretary of the County Fair Association, held at Charleston every year, and the association's chief feature annually is its trotting and running races."

"Has the fair been held this year?"

"No. It comes off the second week in September."

"About three weeks from now?"

"Of course."

Turning suddenly to Farmer Barry, Nick said:

"Mr. Barry, I'm going to Charleston to stay there till after the fair, unless I change my mind after I reach the place."

Lizzie's face flushed to the roots of her hair—this time not with embarrassment.

There was indignation in her voice as she addressed Nick:

"You are not going to suspect Mr. Mansfield of the theft of the horse?"

Nick's reassuring smile in part mollified the girl. His words dispelled her anger and fear.

"Mr. Mansfield may be as innocent of such an act as you, Miss Barry. But I feel confident that your father's horse will be found at Charleston, and that is why I am going there. I want you to give me a letter of introduction and recommendation to Mr. Mansfield."

Lizzie looked at Nick sharply as he uttered these words.

"Do you mean it?" she finally said.

"Indeed I do. Mr. Mansfield is the only one there whom I want to trust with a knowledge of my mission. He can, I feel certain, help me materially."

Lizzie, for answer, extended her hand with a smile, and Nick shook it warmly.

Then he added:

"But I must have some supposed business there as a blind. My profession or mission must not be suspected. Could I rent a small farm nearby the town?"

"Why, papa, Uncle Si's place up there is just the thing."

"That's so," agreed Barry. "My brother-in-law owns a small farm adjoining the fair-ground at Charleston, which is vacant and which he has been vainly trying to rent or sell since spring."

"Where is this brother-in-law?"

"He lives just a mile from here with his son Josh."

"Well, I want to see him."

"We'll go over there to-night if you like."

"That will do."

The visit to Uncle Si was made and a long interview resulted.

Next morning the neighbors were surprised to hear that Uncle Si and Josh and Mickey Cassidy, the hired man, were going to Charleston for a month or so to rig up the old man's farm at that place.

At the same time Nick and Chick started to New York.

On the way to the city Nick said:

"Now then, my boy, we'll have to sojourn in the country after all, and if we don't have lots of fun at Charleston besides, I'll miss my calculations very much."

CHAPTER III.

OLD CULPEPPER'S NEW MASTER.

On the day following Nick's visit to John Barry's farm Chick and Patsy set off for Charleston.

None of their friends, however, would have recognized Nick's two assistants in the young countryman and the Irish lad who took the train at Jersey City.

But John Barry's neighbors would have sworn it was Uncle Si Weed's son Josh and his hired "hand," Mickey Cassidy, so well were the two detectives "made up" to counterfeit their men.

And what was Nick Carter doing all this time?

While Chick and Patsy were flying as fast as steam could take them toward Charleston, their superior was closeted with a well-known owner of a stable of race-horses on Long Island.

Nick had done this man a valuable professional service at one time, and his greeting was of the most cordial kind.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Carter?" asked the horseman, as soon as the two were comfortably seated in a room by themselves.

"How do you know that I want a favor?" inquired Nick.

"Because I owe you more than one, and because I know your time is too valuable to be spent in making a social call."

"Well, you are right. I do want a favor from you."

"It is granted before you state it."

"We'll see. You have a large stable of racers, I believe?"

"Yes; too large, in fact. They are eating me out of house and home, and under the Jockey Club's rules, only the finest horseflesh just now can earn their feed."

"How many horses have you that can beat 1.41 on a good track?"

"Four or five, when they are good and the weights are not too heavy," was the prompt reply.

"Well, I want to lease one of them for six weeks."

"What's that? Not going into the business, are you?"

"Only slightly. Listen, and I'll soon make you understand what I mean."

Thereupon Nick spoke rapidly and uninterruptedly for several minutes, ending with:

"Now you know exactly what I want."

The horseman's black eyes were snapping with excitement when Nick finished.

"I have exactly the horse for you. Just now he is of little worth to me, because, on account of his age, he is handicapped with too much weight in every race I enter him, and he can't carry weight for that distance."

"But at 108 pounds or less old Culpepper can run the head off any 142 horse at a mile."

"Then old Culpepper will suit exactly," smiled Nick.

"He is yours. But mind, now, you must not go an ounce over 108 pounds or he might fail you. He can't pick up weight as he could when he was a four-year-old."

"What is his age now?"

"Six."

"Is he easily handled?"

"Very; and runs kindly at all times. Any competent boy can handle him."

"Have you such a lightweight jockey that you could spare to ride him for me when I get ready?"

"There is a boy at this track that would suit in every way but one. He can ride at ninety-five pounds, and is thoroughly competent, but——"

"Well, but what?"

"He's not trustworthy. He could be bought for fifty dollars. That is his fault."

"What is his name?"

"Clem."

"Colored?"

"Yes."

"Well, when I telegraph to you I want you to ship Clem to me, and see that he isn't dressed any too well."

"All right, Mr. Carter. But keep your eyes on him when he gets there."

"I'll take care of Clem, never fear."

Just a week after John Barry's visit to Nick Carter in New York City the great detective, in the character of Silas Weed, and a perfect counterpart of Uncle Si in appearance, talk and manners, drove into Charleston.

The pseudo Josh and Mickey Cassidy met him at the postoffice corner, where the usual crowd of loungers from the town had gathered in the dusk of the evening.

Nearly everybody knew that the middle-aged farmer with the Greeley beard and the frowsy head of long hair was Silas Weed from Jersey, come to Charleston to help his son and hired man put his neglected farm into condition so it could be sold in the fall.

He drove up with a two-horse farm-wagon loaded with supplies and implements drawn by a pair of horses.

There was nothing about the team to attract much attention. The off horse was a large iron gray, blind in one eye and possessing a well-developed case of bone spavin.

The near horse was the better-looking animal.

He was not so large as his mate, but was much "poorer," and his bony framework was decidedly conspicuous.

His color was a dark bay.

This animal's actions in harness were not such as to inspire farmers with an admiration for his worth as a worker.

Altogether Si Weed's team didn't make a favorable impression upon the citizens of Charleston and Clay County, who happened to see the old man drive the "critters" through Main street.

And if Mr. Weed had seen fit to offer the two horses at public auction there and then, it is doubtful whether so much as sixty dollars would have been offered for the pair.

Old Si addressed the bay horse as "Sport," and yet a close observer might have perceived a noticeable indifference on the part of the lean and hungry-looking Sport to the sound of his name.

If somebody had yelled "Culpepper," the old gelding would doubtless have pricked up his ears and given a neigh of recognition.

Josh and Mickey piled into the farmer's wagon and the three left for the old farmhouse a half mile from the corporation line, "just this side the fair ground," leaving the crowd to speculate "how in thunder old Weed had managed to drive from his place in Jersey to Charleston with that there team in six days."

As soon as the Weeds got home, had stabled their team, and "father and son" entered the house, where they would be safe from being overheard, while the pretended Mickey Cassidy watched and "did chores" on the outside, Nick threw off his "hayseed" manners and tone and inquired:

"Well, lad, what news?"

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed, Nick, but it looks discouraging."

"How so?"

"I've been here nearly a week, you know, and there isn't a horse in the county whose history I've not run down."

"And you have no trace of the one?"

Chick shook his head mournfully.

"No new horse has come into this vicinity, Nick, since Hamlet was stolen. That you can bet on."

If Chick expected his chief to be cast down by the news, he was doomed to be disappointed.

Nick merely thought a few moments before he replied, in a cheerful tone:

"Then we must wait; that's all. I'm as sure as I live that Hamlet will, in some manner, turn up at Charleston in time to be an important factor in the Clay County Fair races."

"And if he does, Nick——"

"Well then there will be the biggest excitement in Charleston on that day that the oldest inhabitant can recall. When old Sport, out there, gets through with the stolen Hamlet and another 'outsider,' I think every one at the track will be satisfied he has seen a horse-race."

"Then we'll stay here a while?"

"Yes. And get ready for the Clay County races."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SMALL MAN WITH A RED FACE.

Like all small country towns, Charleston had an institution known as "the hotel," where could be had "entertainment for man and beast."

It was called the "Blue Lion," and was owned and managed by a typical "tavern-keeper," known to everybody as "Uncle Mory."

The large and commodious office of the Blue Lion was a favorite trysting place for the gossips of Charleston every evening after supper.

It was also a sort of Board of Exchange, for in that room and on the great veranda in front of it many bargains, sales and trades were made during the year.

There was a small bar opening off the large office, where Uncle Mory dispensed to his customers cigars and choice brands of liquor whenever they were called for.

Silas Weed and his son Josh were by no means backward about joining the "club" at the Blue Lion, and on the second evening after their arrival in Charleston Si rode up in front of the tavern on the bony looking, dark bay horse which he had hitched to his wagon on his arrival.

Josh was already on hand, having walked over from the farm a half hour before.

There was an unusual gathering of the

townspeople at the hotel that evening, and as the weather was warm, most of them were congregated on the veranda and steps.

As Si rode up, dismounted, and tied his horse to a hitching post, he became the object of general observation.

Everybody knew who he was—the farmer from Jersey, who owned the fair ground farm and had come up to fix it up and try to sell it.

In a speculative sense, therefore, Silas Weed was an object of unusual interest to the Charlestonians.

The landlord was the first to greet him.

"Got a buyer for your farm yit, Mr. Weed?"

"Not yit. I han't had time to talk about it with no one, but I'm open to an offer."

"Goin' to fix it up fust, an't you?"

"Did think of that, but everything is so topsy-turvy that I'd sell jest as she is if I kin, an' at a sacrifice. It 'ud take me an' the boys two months to put the place in decent shape. So I kem to the conclusion I'd jest lay back a bit an' see ef somebody wouldn't take it off my hands at a bargain in its present shape."

"Well, wait around till the fair week. You couldn't have a better time to find a buyer."

"When's that?"

"Week after next."

"Brings big crowds, does it?"

"Oh, yes. 'Specially on Derby Day."

"On which?"

"Derby Day. That's when the big races come off, and we run the Derby."

"What's that?"

"Why, a race at a mile for running horses, for a purse of two thousand dollars and an entry fee of twenty-five dollars each."

"Who's in it?"

"Anybody who resides in the county, or is doing business here, providing his horse is known to be one he uses in his everyday business."

"Begosh, that must be fan! Guess I'll have to be in it."

There was a quiet laugh among the throng at this expression from Farnier Weed.

"Oh, I don't expect to win that there purse, but old Sport thar'll make some of the other nags hump. In his days he was quite a pert animal under a saddle. If I run him, I'll bet my boots he'll not be last."

"He looks like a steady going horse."

"So he be. Maybe you'd like to buy him?"

"You 'pear to be on the sell."

"I am. I'll sell anything I've got, if I kin get my price."

"What'll you take for him?"

"About a hundred and eighty."

A general laugh went up at Weed's "gall."

"Guess I'll not take him," said Uncle Mory. "I've got one now which I'll sell at a bargain."

"Why, Mory, I didn't know you kept a horse!" exclaimed a small, red-faced man who was sitting on the steps whittling a pine stick.

"Neither did I till this mornin'. I bought the critter ruther suddint like."

"From who?"

"Couldn't tell you."

"What?" chorused a half dozen in a breath.

"Don't know his name; leastways, don't remember it," said Uncle Mory, fully alive to the fact that he had his listeners all by the ears. "He told me what 'twas, but I've forgot."

"A hoss-thief, I'll bet my boots!" cried the little red-faced man.

"I feared he wur, too, and I'm not dead certain now that he wurn't. But he told a likely story 'bout gittin' a letter that his child in Denver wur very sick, an' he wur wild to go to it. He wur cotched short on money, an' his only way out wur to sell the horse."

"A likely story."

"Oh, I seed the letter, an' it kem through the postoffice here."

"What was the feller doin' in these parts?"

"Ridin' through to the next county. Was sellin' a patent for a new-fangled hayrake, I believe."

"So you took his horse?"

"Yes; give him fifty dollars for the animal."

"What sort of an animal is it?"

"Right smart lookin' critter. I'll let you see him. Hey, Rube! Go fetch the hoss around from the stable!" he shouted to a boy who was sweeping the stoop.

When the horse was led forth by the lad, an exclamation of general surprise went up.

"Not a bad lookin' hoss."

"Ain't mor'n four years old."

"Wuth at least twicet what you paid fur him."

"If he's not stolen, you've got a bargain."

One old farmer had been looking at the animal carefully and closely. In the end he said to Mory:

"I'll give you forty dollars fur your bargain."

"Can't take it, Lem," was the slow reply.

"Why?"

"Well, I've promised to keep him two months, and if the man comes back in that time I'm to give him up on the return of my fifty dollars and ten dollars more fur keepin' him; if the feller doesn't claim the hoss in that time, I'm to own him outright. Then whoever offers most gits him, fur I've no use fur a beast anyhow."

The landlord's purchase was the object of general inspection by the crowd, and Si Weed was foremost among the men who "looked him over."

The general verdict of the inspectors was that the animal was sound, and that if everything was straight, Uncle Mory had secured a bargain.

"Well, m' the so," sighed the landlord, "if he don't cut his head off, fur I haven't anything to do with a loss."

"Might rent him out," suggested the red-faced man.

"Don't know nobody that needs a critter. Everybody seems purty well supplied."

As if in response to the landlord's assertion, a tall, slim man, who at that moment hurried up the steps, said, loudly, with the air of a man who is giving news to his neighbors:

"Talking about horses reminds me that Yates Durrell's gray mare died half an hour ago."

The little man with the red face sprang to his feet, and with well-stimulated surprise, which deceived everybody about him except two persons, cried:

"What's that? Yates's mare dead? You ain't jokin', doc?"

"It's no jokin' matter. Yates sent fur me as soon as he found she was sick, and I tried my best to save her. No use, though."

The speaker was the veterinary surgeon of Charleston.

"What ailed the beast?"

"Poisoned."

"Who done it?" came the ungrammatical but intense query in chorus from half a dozen lips.

"Durrell hasn't the least idea in the world. He didn't know he had an enemy mean enough to take out his spite on the horse."

"I'll bet four dollars some one done it who was afraid of the mare winnin' the Derby week after next," sputtered the little man with the red face.

"Shouldn't be surprised, fur I guess no horse in the county could lay claims to beating that mare in a running race," assented the horse doctor.

"Specially when Tiny rode him," supplemented the landlord. "Miss Durrell made the mare fly when she was on its back. She's by far the best horsewoman in these parts."

"Well, Durrell's in a bad fix, I guess," said

the man with the red face. "Me and him were goin' out to 'lectioneer to-morrow, but the death of his mare'll knock that plan in the head, I guess."

"I'll sell him one of mine, if he wants to buy," broke in Si Weed, who had all this time been a silent but an interested listener.

The red-faced man answered with a sneer:

"Yates Durrell wouldn't be ketched out among the farmers axing fur their votes an' driving a plug like one of your'n, old man."

"What do you mean, you infernal flannel-faced toad?" roared old Weed, shaking his fist at the red-faced man.

The latter uttered a suppressed oath, and, running up to Weed, yelled:

"You'll eat them words, or swallow my fist, sure as you're born!"

"I will, will I?" sputtered Weed. "Go back to your cage!"

So saying, Weed picked the red-faced man up in both hands, as if he were a stick of wood, and sent him whirling up on the porch.

For an instant the red-faced man lay dazed and stunned, while a look of admiration for Si Weed spread over the faces of the spectators.

When the victim of the old farmer's display of strength finally pulled himself together, he glared unutterable things at the old man, and, shaking his fist toward him, declared with an oath:

"I'll get even with you if it takes a hundred years!"

"Wa-al, I reckon it'll take 'bout that long fur a man like you to git the best of me," was the cool reply, which raised a decided laugh among the crowd.

Soon afterward the crowd began to disperse, but Farmer Weed and his son, Josh, remained and were among the last to go home.

Once secure in the old farm-house, however, Nick and Chick laid aside their preten-

sions as Si Weed and Josh, and compared notes.

"What did you find out about the man you pitched up on the porch, Nick?" asked Chick.

"His name is Pete Addy. He came here nearly a year ago, and soon afterward formed a partnership with Yates Durrell in the insurance business."

"Where'd he come from?"

"New York, he said."

"But he didn't?"

"I think not."

"Nick, the fellow's crooked."

"I believe you have him down fine, my boy. How about Durrell?"

"He stands pretty well in the public estimation, is a little inclined to be tricky, and is consumed with a burning desire to break into politics."

"Lived here long?"

"All his life. Has a wife and daughter."

"The girl they called Tiny, the daring rider?"

"I guess so. The worst thing I found against Durrell was his friendship for Pete Addy. The latter is not generally liked in Charleston or Clay County."

"Queer about Durrell's mare being poisoned."

"So it struck me. Especially as the mare seemed to have been considered a sort of favorite for the fair Derby."

"Queer that she was poisoned on the same day that the landlord met with such a bargain in that strange horse."

"Now we're down to hard pan, I guess," smiled Chick. "You've recognized the landlord's purchase?"

"Without a doubt."

"It is John Barry's stolen race-horse?"

"Sure as you are Chick."

"And, like me, somewhat disguised?"

"Yes. Most artistically dyed so that Barry himself would hardly recognize Hamlet."

"He's been brought here to win the Derby?"

"That's right."

"What in thunder is the game, Nick?"

"I can't understand it exactly yet, but mean to get to the bottom. It's something big, however, you may depend on it."

"Who's in it? Not the landlord?"

"I think not. He's merely a dupe."

"Durrell?"

"I'm not sure about Durrell."

"Pete Addy?"

"Now you've named one of the rascals, anyhow. We must watch Addy."

"And meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile, my boy, old Culpepper must be kept in condition for the fair Derby," was Nick's reply. "Patsy is as good a trainer as any at Brighton, Sheepshead Bay and Morris Park. He must take charge of our entry and see to it that Culpepper is fit to race for his life week after next."

CHAPTER V.

THE PATENT PLOW MAN APPEARS.

Two events occurred at Charleston several days later which attracted the attention of the pretended farmer, Weed, and his son, Josh.

In the first place, they learned that Yates Durrell and Pete Addy had, in spite of the death of the former's gray mare, started off into the country on that electioneering trip.

What was the most significant fact connected with the affair was the discovery that they had "rented" the landlord's newly purchased horse to take the place of the mare which had been poisoned.

Uncle Mory was greatly relieved to know that he had found a use for the horse, which would relieve him of the expense of keeping such a useless article until the time of its redemption expired.

The horse evidently had not been much used to harness, as was evinced by its ac-

tions when hitched up, but Yates Durrell was an excellent horseman and succeeded in persuading the disguised racer to trot away at an awkward stride.

Nick discovered, without much trouble, that Pete Addy had made the arrangement whereby the landlord's horse became the temporary property of Yates Durrell.

The second important incident of the day was the arrival in Charleston of a sunburned, red-bearded, bushy-headed man of middle age, driving a team of horses hitched to a road-wagon, and accompanied by a boy he called "sonny."

They put up at the Blue Lion, and the man gave his name as Nate Vaughn, from Springfield.

His business was to sell a patent sub-soil plow, and he wanted to canvass the county and remain until after the fair, which he understood was to take place in a few weeks.

He seemed very anxious to place his new style plow on exhibition at the fair.

Meanwhile he would not waste the intervening time, but would make the personal acquaintance of the farmers of Clay County.

As soon as Si Weed heard of Nate Vaughn's arrival he sought the latter out, and became much interested in the patent plow.

Indeed, old Weed's curiosity over the improved agricultural implement was so deep and lasting that it finally wore out the patience of the patent vendor, and Nate Vaughn's unbounded interest in the subject as at first displayed gradually cooled off and finally lapsed into a state of uncontrolled irritation.

The great detective in this way had analyzed the patent plow man as a chemist would analyze a liquid compound.

And when he had a chance to speak to Chick about it privately, Nick said:

"The fellow is a fraud of the first water.

He doesn't care a rap for his patent plow. That plow is a mere blind, that is all. It covers up some other purpose for which he has come to Charleston, you may bet your last dollar."

"You think he's in the plot—with the gang which stole John Barry's horse?"

"I'm inclined to think so. Yet I can't exactly fix him in the deal. When he and Pete Addy meet, and I am there to take notes, maybe I can make more out of Nate Vaughn than I can now."

When Yates Durrell and Pete Addy came in rather late that evening, the patent plow man was on the veranda of the hotel, making his observations.

Nick Carter and Chick, in their roles of St. Weed and son, were of the crowd, and their eyes never lost sight of Vaughn, Addy and Durrell during the time those three were in each other's presence. The result was summed up when Nick and Chick got back to the farm-house after "adjournment."

"Well, Chick," said Nick, "let me hear the result of your observations."

"All right. First, Durrell is not in it."

"You mean he doesn't know Vaughn, and has no interest in that person?"

"I'll bet on it."

"That's correct, I think. Go on."

"If Vaughn knows either Durrell or Addy, or has any interest in either, he's an all-fired good actor in concealing it."

"I don't believe it is acting, Chick. The patent plow man is not good enough at acting to deceive us. That I proved this forenoon."

"Then what in thunder do you make out of Addy's case?"

"Ah, I see you are on to Addy!"

"Why, a man with one eye could see that Addy was wonderfully pleased at finding Vaughn in the hotel when he and Durrell got back from the country."

"That's so. Addy knows who Vaughn is, and why he is in Charleston."

"Yet Vaughn is ignorant of Addy's interest in him."

"It looks that way, Chick."

"Well, then, altogether it's a puzzler."

Nick made no reply, but sat staring into Chick's face as if the latter had enchanted him.

Chick had seen Nick wrapped up in those unblinking, staring fits before, and he said not a word to interrupt this one, for well he knew the great detective was wrestling with a newly born thought of magnitude.

For fully two minutes the stare continued. Then Nick leaned forward and spoke:

"Chick, I believe I've solved the puzzle."

"Good! I'm anxious to hear the solution."

"Well, we both agree that John Barry's horse was stolen for a purpose."

"Sure."

"And brought to Charleston to accomplish that purpose."

"Yes."

"Which purpose is to win the fair Derby hands down."

"Without much doubt."

"And that Pete Addy is in the plot."

"Bet your life on it."

"One thing all along has puzzled me, Chick."

"What's that?"

"How the game could be big enough in such a race to pay even a criminal like Addy may be for taking the risk of stealing a horse to accomplish his purpose."

"You think he couldn't get enough money bet among the farmers to pay for the risk?"

"Just so. But now the skies are clearing above me."

"Well? I'm a little in the dark yet myself, Nick."

"Why, bless your soul, Chick, Addy's 'ringer' is to be played against another 'ringer'."

"Eh?" exclaimed Chick, sitting bolt upright and beginning in his turn to stare at Nick.

"This patent plow man," continued Nick Carter, "is one of those sharks who sneak into county fairs where racing is a part of the features, and work off a superior horse on the rustic bettors. One of his horses or both are 'hot stuff' and capable of beating any native stock in the county."

"I see. Addy learned of Vaughn's plans somehow, and is fixed to go him one better with Hamlet as a 'ringer.'"

"Correct. And here we are with a third 'ringer' in old Culpepper, who ought to race both the other 'sure things' to a stand-still."

Chick could scarcely repress his excitement.

"Why, Nick, that will be a horse-race worth going to see, will it not?"

"Shouldn't wonder. It will if it isn't botched. I brought Culpepper here to beat Hamlet only, and now he has another opponent. Well, if Hamlet can beat Vaughn's 'ringer,' and I suppose Addy knows what he is going up against there, why Culpepper can beat Hamlet, if well ridden."

"Then it looks like a lead-pipe cinch for us, Nick!" chuckled Chick.

"It must be a lead-pipe cinch. For if I don't make enough money out of that race to pay off John Barry's mortgage and have a snug sum left for Miss Lizzie's wedding portion, it will be because old Culpepper falls dead in the stretch."

CHAPTER VI.

MICKY CASSIDY'S LOVE AFFAIR.

Patsy came in on Nick and Chick just as the former uttered the words which close the last chapter.

"Well, I guess they haven't begun to train Hamlet for the race yet," said Patsy, "for

I've been over at Durrell's, and I saw the horse when they drove in."

"Didn't show signs of fast work, then?" commented Nick.

"Nope! The horse hasn't been in much of a sweat to-day."

"That makes me more than ever convinced that Durrell isn't in Addy's confidence," asserted Nick.

"But he will be before the trick is worked out?" said Chick.

"Of course, else Addy would not be using him now."

"Nick, do you think Durrell is a rogue?"

"No."

"Then how can Addy use him?"

"I don't know. Yet I've faith in Durrell's honesty to a certain extent. I think he is exactly what his local reputation puts him at—inclined to be tricky, but incapable of downright dishonesty."

"I don't see how a man who has such a daughter as Durrell's girl is could be a rascal," put in Patsy.

"Oh, ho!" whistled Nick. "So you've been keeping an eye open for feminine beauty, eh?"

"Yes, and not in vain, either."

"This Miss Durrell is a beauty, is she?"

"She's a picture in dimity and blonde hair. Not larger than a bag of salt, but what there is of her—oh, my!"

Chick laughed at Patsy's earnestness, but it didn't affect the Irish lad a particle.

"Not going to fall in love with Miss Durrell, are you?" quizzed Nick.

"Not if I know it! I'm too busy making love to their Irish maid of all work. That's what I've been doing this afternoon, and I guess I can report considerable progress."

"Well, let us hear your report."

"I found out that Miss Tiny Durrell has a little private love affair of her own."

"How did you discover that?"

"She saw me kitting up to Bridget, and I expressed a belief that my presence might get the old girl into trouble.

"'Not on yez loif!' she cried. 'Shoore, isn't it a lover that Miss Tiny herself has, unbeknowinst to any wan but me. It's to her interesht intoirely to stan' pat wid Bridget O'Flaherty. Thrust Miss Tiny, do yez moind that.'

"Then I gradually wormed from Miss O'Flaherty the fact that Tiny Durrell is carrying on a clandestine love affair with a certain young man of this town."

Nick uttered a low whistle, and inquired:

"Do you know who he is?"

"His name is Lester Tate. He is a drug clerk and an intimate friend of Parke Mansfield."

"Of Parke Mansfield? That is Lizzie Barry's lover, and the secretary of the Clay County Fair Association, to whom she wrote about Hamlet's racing abilities and her father's plans to retrieve his fortunes."

"The very same, I guess. And, what's more, I understand Lizzie and Tiny were warm friends. They both attended the young ladies' seminary on the edge of the town."

"Why does Miss Durrell keep her love affair concealed from her father?"

"Because he is dead set against Tate on account of that young man's antagonistic political pull."

"Humph!"

"I got hold of some other news, too."

"Get with it, then."

"This Pete Addy——"

"Well, what of Pete Addy?"

"He fell desperately in love with Lizzie Barry while she was going to school here. Met her at Durrell's house. She laughed at his love, and he swore he'd get even with her and Mansfield if it took twenty years."

Again Nick uttered his soft, significant whistle. Turning to Chick, he said:

"My boy, I must have a chance to talk seriously and secretly to young Mansfield."

"What for?"

"I want to find out how Addy learned the secret of John Barry's race-horse."

"But you'll have to take Mansfield into your confidence to do that."

"Well, I don't know but that I'll have to do that, anyhow."

"Why?"

"He is secretary of the Fair Association. He can help us to get Culpepper into the Derby."

"Well, you know your business. How can I help you?"

"By arranging it so that I can get a good talk with the young man."

"Consider it done."

"And meanwhile, Patsy, you'll have two jobs on your hands."

"What are they?"

"First, to press your love affair with Miss O'Flaherty, and thereby keep your eyes on the Durrells and Peter Addy, Esq."

"Secondly, to carefully and secretly prepare Culpepper for a bruising race in time for the Clay County Derby."

"All right, sir. I'll find some convenient stretch of road in a lonesome part of the country, and put the old fellow into running form."

Several days later Nick had his much-desired private talk with Parke Mansfield. Chick, in his character of the farmer's son, made Mansfield's acquaintance and invented a plausible excuse to get the young man out to the farm.

Chick's ruse was one of human nature. In talking to Mansfield, he mentioned John Barry.

Then Mansfield became interested in "Josh" at once.

A little further conversation brought out the fact that the Barrys and Weeds were neighbors in Jersey.

Mansfield confessed that he had met Miss Barry several times while she was going to school at Charleston.

Josh had seen Miss Lizzie frequently, but wasn't very well acquainted with her.

"You see," he said, with a laugh, "she han't jest my style, or ruther I'm not her'n. That gal's edicated, an' I'd cut a queer figger in her company, I guess. So, as I'm ruther backward, anyhow, I jest kept a leetle shy of her."

"But dad knows her like a book. Pop is always cottenin' up to purty gals, old as he is. Gosh, he's got more cheek 'mong the critters than most young fellers."

"Queer, too, that they all like the old man. Miss Lizzie an' him, now, are as thick as two peas in a pod. Most always talkin' low like to themselves and laughin' like all tarnation."

"That reminds me that pop axed me t'other day whether I knowed anybody up hur by the name of Mansfield."

"He meant me," suggested the young man, with interest plainly depicted in his words.

"Must hev. I'll bet two dollars Lizzie Barry hed been mentioning to him that she met you up hur."

"I haven't had the pleasure of meeting your father yet, Mr. Weed," was the broad hint thrown out.

"Pop would be tickled to death to know you, I'll bet," said Josh. "Can you go over an' see him? I'll interdooce you."

Mansfield gladly accepted the invitation, and not long afterward was sitting under a large tree in the Weed yard, getting acquainted with the presumable "Uncle Si."

"So, you're the young man Lizzie Barry has so often talked to me about? I guess the gal's sort o' gone on you."

This information was accompanied by a wink and a wag of the head, and caused the color to come into young Mansfield's dark face.

"I'm surely flattered to think Miss Barry remembers me occasionally," was Parke's reply.

Nick looked around carefully, as if to assure himself that the coast was clear, and then said, in an undertone:

"It's all right, Mansfield. I know more'n you think. Lizzie and me are not friends for nuthin'. She's a nice gal, an' you're probably worthy of her. But yer both poor, an' nuther of yer have much prospects of better'n your conditions at present."

"I see you are partly in her confidence, Mr. Weed," replied Mansfield. "We do expect to be married next winter if things turn out well with her father."

"But things are not turning out well for John Barry."

"I think his luck will take a turn this fall. We hope so, at least."

"Young man, I can trust you, I guess?"

"Why, yes, of course you can," said Mansfield, looking puzzled.

"Leastways, Lizzie said I could, and she gave me this when I was gitting ready to come to Charleston."

So saying, Nick pulled from an inside pocket an envelope somewhat soiled and crumpled by much handling.

Mansfield recognized the handwriting on the envelope, and his eyes brightened as he saw it was addressed to him.

Rather eagerly he tore open the envelope and read the inclosed note with evident surprise. It ran thus:

"DEAR PARKE: The bearer, Uncle Silas Weed, is our near neighbor, and papa's best friend. He will be in Charleston a few weeks and may want to take you into his confidence. You can trust him as you would trust me. Be honest, helpful and truthful in whatever he asks of you, for he is there in our interests as well as his own. He will tell you what the mission is. Yours as ever, LIZZIE."

Mansfield looked up from the letter to meet Nick's eyes.

"I don't quite catch her meaning," he said.

"You spoke of the hope which John Barry had of bettering his condition."

"I did."

"You referred to his plans of retrieving his fortunes with the aid of a race-horse whose abilities he has been keeping concealed."

Nick suddenly dropped his illiterate way of talking.

Mansfield made no reply, but shifted uneasily in his seat.

"Oh, you need not fear to confess your knowledge of it," said Nick. "For Lizzie told me she wrote you about it."

"Well, if she did, I don't see what you are driving at."

"But maybe you will when I tell you that the horse has been stolen."

The news certainly startled Mansfield, and he showed it by his looks.

"Stolen?" he exclaimed. "When? By whom?"

"About two weeks ago. Who stole him no one knows—as yet. Maybe we can find out. That's what I'm drivin' at, as you call it."

"And the horse—has not been recovered?"

"Not yet; but I can lay my hands on him when I want him, I guess. The p'int is to catch the thieves at the same time."

"Were there more than one?"

"I guess so. More'n one concerned in the trick—who knew what Hamlet could do in the running line."

"Why, that was a dead secret of Lizzie's and her father."

"It was till she wrote to you about it."

"Oh, but she knew I would not give it away."

"She did, did she? Well, didn't you?"

"I? Well, certainly not!"

"Mr. Mansfield, I don't like to be insolent, nor yet insulting, but I must tell you I don't believe you're entirely truthful when you say

you never told anybody about that horse. How about your friend Tate?"

The blood rushed into Mansfield's face with tell-tale effect.

"Did he tell you—he certainly——"

"Oh, Tate never said a word about it, and I don't know him. But you did confide your secret to him."

"Yes, I did; but I'd trust my life with him. He's the soul of honor, and he promised me on his word——"

"Not to tell a livin' soul?" interrupted Nick. "Oh, I know without your telling me. Then he told his sweetheart, Tiny Durrell, and she promised to keep the secret, too."

"How do you know he did?"

"Because that's the only way Pete Addy could find out John Barry's secret."

"Pete Addy? He knows about that horse?"

"He does, for a fact; and, what is more, he's got the horse."

Mansfield sat and stared at the supposed Farmer Weed for fully a minute.

At the end of that time Nick took the young man fully into his confidence, and told the entire story of Addy's plot, as he, Nick, had figured it out.

But he carefully kept concealed from Mansfield his own identity as Nick Carter and Chick's real character as his assistant.

"Then it's Addy's game to beat this other rascal, Vaughn, in the Derby with John Barry's horse?" summed up Mansfield.

"Just so."

"But you'll spoil his game?"

"We will for a fact."

"And restore Mr. Barry's horse to him?"

"Korrek! But it'll be too late for Barry to carry out his original plans with Hamlet."

"Good Heavens! Then he'll be ruined!"

"No, I guess not. We'll save John, with your help."

"With my help? Why, how?"

"Well, first place, Addy must be let alone; let use Hamlet to beat Vaughn's 'ringer' at the Derby."

"But——"

Nick once more fell into his country style of talking.

"Never mind your buts. I've got a but as'll knock all the other buts out. It don't foller that ef Addy beats Vaughn's hoss he'll win that Derby—not by a darned sight!"

"Why, there's nothing in this county that has a ghost of a show against Barry's horse."

"Oh, ain't there, though? That's all you know. I'll have a critter in that race myself."

"What, you?"

"Yes, me. And let me tell you, young man, Hamlet won't be in it."

"Why, that's absurd, Mr. Weed. Hamlet's a race-horse."

"Well, what's mine? See hur, boy, Lizzie says in that there letter you're to trust me, don't she?"

"Yes."

"Are ye goin' to do it, or ain't ye got no faith in the gal?"

Mansfield held out his hand to Weed, and without hesitation declared:

"For Lizzie's sake I will."

"That's right. And now don't ask any questions, but jest depend on this. John Barry's hoss will be in the Derby. But he won't win. Yet John Barry'll git every dollar that Pete Addy and Nate Vaughn will bet on their plugs, or Si Weed don't know dog fennel from gympson."

"All the money they'll bet?"

"Every dollar, an' you'll find it won't be a small sum, nuther. They're both out fur a big skinnin', and they'll both git skun. Now, jest keep your trap shet an' don't take yer eyes offen Uncle Silas."

"Depend on me."

"Well! An' this time it isn't to be a secret, but a secret. If you mention what I've

told you to a soul—even to your friend Tate—I'll promise that Lizzie Barry'll never see your face again."

"Don't fear. I've learned a lesson."

"Good! Then, as secretary of the fair, jest enter my two hosses fur the Derby."

"What names?"

"Well, say 'Deacon' and 'Sport.' That'll do fur the race. Arter it's over, one on 'em'll have a different name, maybe."

Mansfield uttered a low whistle and exclaimed:

"I think I see your game."

"Glad you do. Say, how about riders in the race?"

"Every man furnishes his own."

"Big or little, heavy or light?"

"Just as he pleases. It's horse against horse. The jockeys are not considered."

"Then that settles it. Young man, if that Derby turns out as I think it will, you an' Lizzie Barry will stan' up afore the preacher nex' Chris'mas."

CHAPTER VII.

THE RACE FOR THE TRIAL STAKES.

After that first interview between Mansfield and Nick, the former paid a number of visits to the Weed place, and Nick gained a great deal of valuable information from the young man.

He learned that Addy was reputed to have considerable money which he brought with him when he came to Charleston.

It also turned out that Addy and Mansfield were not friends. Nick knew the cause. It was also believed that Addy's influence over Durrell caused the latter to refuse his daughter, Tiny, the privilege of openly accepting Lester Tate's attentions.

Consequently Miss Durrell cordially despised Addy, and showed her dislike for him openly. There was no love lost between them, for Addy accused her of having influ-

enced Lizzie Barry against him, and he took pleasure in getting even.

Addy's influence over Durrell was so great that people could scarcely understand it. By close investigation, Nick discovered that Durrell was deeply in Addy's debt, and that the latter was slowly but surely getting Durrell in a position where he could ruin him or use him as he pleased.

Patsy, through his rapid and successful suit with Miss O'Flaherty, was enabled to get pretty deep into the secrets of the Durrells, and it was he who brought Nick most of the information about that family.

Patsy also reported that Culpepper was training well, and would be fit to race for a kingdom on the day of the Derby.

He took the old racer out into the country about five miles every night between midnight and dawn and gave the old track favorite a long exercise gallop over a stretch of lonely road.

Though neither Nick nor any of his aids knew it as a matter of sight, they were aware that Addy had taken Durrell into his confidence, and that the two were secretly training Hamlet during their daily electioneering trips to the country.

Chick discovered that after the arrival of Vaughn, Addy and Durrell would get home later and later every night, and that Hamlet on each occasion showed the signs of violent exercise, which he could not have got hitched to a wagon or in harness.

All this time Vaughn was canvassing the country for his patent plow, and he invariably went on horseback, carrying a small model.

Meanwhile the day of the opening of the Cass County Fair drew near, and little was talked about at the Blue Lick gatherings than the approaching Derby.

There were several horses in the county which were looked upon as the likely win-

ners on account of their previous records in the races of former years.

There were also a few new candidates in colts which had never been on the track, but which their owners believed had an outside chance.

As the stake was a rich one, well worth taking chances on, the starters were sure to be numerous.

Vaughn, the plow man, was the first to show an outside interest in the big race.

He began to make many inquiries. Wanted to know what was the best time made in the ten years during which the races were run, and whether a man could ride his own horse.

He was even tempted to try for the prize himself. One of his horses—the one he rode into the country—was a pretty fair goer, and he didn't believe many horses in those parts could beat it.

The upshot was that he began to train for the race, to the great amusement of those who watched the rather lumbering little animal as he rode it up and down the main street.

Nick was watching Addy and Durrell while the crowd was watching Vaughn, and he did not fail to notice the understanding looks which they cast at each other.

The patent plow man's boy paid very little attention to his father's equestrian exhibitions, except to laugh with the rest and say he guessed "pop" could do better selling plows than running races.

The Derby was down for the afternoon of the third day of the fair. On the second day there was a trial running race for a hundred-dollar purse for horses which had no show, as it was supposed, in the Derby. The distance was a quarter of a mile less than in the Derby.

After numerous efforts to get his horse into a fast stride, Vaughn concluded he had

better make an effort to capture the Trial Stakes, and not bother about the Derby.

The entries for each race closed on the day of the respective races at ten o'clock in the morning.

In one of his rides from the city Patsy had carried a telegram from Nick to the owner of Culpepper, and the telegram had been transmitted at the station below Charleston.

Several days later—the day preceding the opening of the fair—Patsy, on his daily ride, drew up at this same station just before the New York train came in, and waited.

When the train arrived a colored boy, rather poorly dressed, alighted and loafed around the platform till the train had gone on again.

Then Patsy took him upon the horse behind, and the two rode back to the Weed farm, where the little darky was domiciled and given rather easy tasks to accomplish.

He and Nick had several confidential chats and seemed to reach a good understanding.

The boy was called "Clem," and he addressed Nick as "Massa Weed."

On the first day of the fair there were nothing but a few unimportant trotting races, yet the attendance was large and the sport good.

Every means of accommodating the strangers was exhausted in Charleston before the evening of that day, and later arrivals were compelled to camp out.

The Blue Lion was overflowing, and Uncle Mory was compelled to put cots in his large dining-room and turn it into a dormitory at night.

Mansfield informed Nick that for the first time in the history of the fair there were a dozen strangers who had come to Charleston and purchased privileges. As a rule they were young men.

One sold a patent soap, warranted to do more things.

Another was a photographer, who made wonderful tintypes at a ruinously low rate.

And so on, till the dozen were "fixed" in their various "fakir" businesses around the fair grounds.

These strangers had an unusual interest for Nick and Chick, and after studying the lot on the first day of the fair Nick asked Chick what he made of them.

"I guess they don't make their money as they pretend," was Chick's reply. "I'll bet a button they'll all be very much interested in the Clay County Derby."

"We'll keep our eyes on them, anyhow," said Nick.

The betting began on the uninteresting races of the first day, and was of such an extent that it surprised Nick Carter.

In a subsequent talk which he had with Mansfield, he learned that the fair was made the medium each year for a "gambling bee," in which more than half the farmers of the surrounding counties and of the town of Charleston took part.

Many farms were mortgaged and the money lost at these races, while in other instances mortgages were paid off with the winnings taken out of the pool-box.

The pools were sold under the auspices of the Fair Association at the Blue Lion every night preceding the race, and at the fair ground just before the horses went to the post.

When pools were sold on the trial race of the second day, Pete Addy and Yates Durrell were considerably puzzled at Nate Vaughn's actions concerning that race, and they watched proceedings closely.

Old Silas Weed and his son, Josh, were also at the Blue Lion, watching the sale of pools with evident interest.

A horse entered as "Squash" was the favorite, though another known as "Pete of Charleston" sold only a few dollars less.

The patent plow man's entry would have gone into the field on each pool had not the owner bought him at a small bid in two of the first pools.

Then the plow man let him alone, but as Nick and Addy both observed, one of the stranger fakirs took Vaughn's place in every pool sold thereafter, and bid in the horse for a small sum.

The pool-seller's sheet showed, when business was closed up for the night, that several thousand dollars was in the box to be won and lost on the trial race next day.

And when the pool was opened again at the fair ground a half-hour before the race about one thousand dollars more went into the box. This time Vaughn was not present to bid on his horse, but one of the twelve strangers took out the ticket every time.

Then came the race. There were nine horses lined up at the post.

Vaughn's horse was about the smallest of the lot, and he himself weighed twenty pounds more than any of the other eight amateur jockeys.

There was some trouble getting them off, as each rider was too anxious to reap the advantage of a good start.

Vaughn in his clumsy way spoiled several good starts by pulling up, and at the next attempt he would be out three lengths before the rest had a show. In this way twenty minutes were wasted before they were off.

Vaughn's little horse, to every one's surprise but those who knew his game, shot out to the front and took a lead of five or six lengths. It at first looked as if it was all over for the other eight.

But before the half-mile post was reached, Vaughn's mount began to falter. Vaughn himself looked back and drew his whip. At first the little horse responded to the punishment, but as the bunch turned into the stretch the animal began to tire badly, and

both Squash and Belle of Charleston closed on him.

At the sixteenth post the two local horses had Vaughn nailed. Belle of Charleston and Squash both passed him as if he were standing still, and while the two favorites went under the wire driving a head apart the patent plow man was passed by two of the other six, and he finished a poor fifth.

There was great amusement among the spectators over the patent plow man's ludicrous showing, and they jeered him as he rode back to the judges' stand.

Vaughn seemed to be terribly chagrined, and the taunts from the crowd appeared to arouse his anger. He shook his fist at them and muttered something about getting even.

In Pete Addy's face there shone the light of triumph, and he whispered to Durrell:

"We've got him and his gang sure. They'll bite like catfish after a rain to-night."

And Nick whispered to Chick:

"He has set the trap as neatly as an artist can do it, and is now ready to ring in on the Derby. There'll be fun at the Blue Lion to-night, and more yet at the track to-morrow afternoon."

CHAPTER VIII.

BETTING ON THE DERBY.

The scene at the Blue Lion on that evening preceding the Derby was never equaled in the memory of the citizens of Charleston.

Interest in the great race ran high.

Already eighteen horses had been entered for the race, and several hours remained before the entries would close.

Of the eighteen starters, good judges put down only seven as having a chance. Even Belle of Charleston, which won the Trial Stakes that afternoon, was looked upon as being outclassed, the distance being too much for her.

Half a dozen were thought to be in the

way, as one man expressed it, and of these half dozen old Weed's two were considered the worst.

The favorite was owned by the richest farmer in the county, who had won "several quarter sections" by betting on his horses every year.

This same horse had won the Derby for him the previous year, and in a great plunge at that time he had won twenty thousand dollars, besides the stake. He announced himself ready to bet all he won the previous year on his horse to win again on the morrow.

Nick began to understand what the temptation was which had drawn Vaughn to Charleston with his "ringer."

This farmer's winnings had been made the subject of various newspaper articles at the time. It was also stated in the same connection that his horse would be a contending agent in the next Derby, and that the owner stood ready to bet any man to a standstill who thought he could bring on a horse that would beat him.

Vaughn must have got hold of a copy of one of these Charleston papers and laid his plans nearly a year ahead.

And it followed that Pete Addy probably knew of Vaughn's designs almost as soon as they were formed, and had come at once to Charleston to pave the way for a counter-

"Between these two rogues that guileless old hayseed would have a rather expensive experience," said Nick, in an undertone to Chick, "if we weren't here to help him out."

But the rich farmer's horse was not looked upon by outsiders as a "moral." Several other horses which had been carefully trained to "do up" the winner of the last Derby were believed to have an excellent chance, and an exciting race was anticipated.

The bettor was sure to be thick and large as soon as the action opened, for it was

noised around that some useful information was abroad which would not let the rich farmer's horse have a walk-over in the pools by any means.

While the crowd was waiting for the pool-selling to begin, and the owner of "Duke," the former winner, stood in the centre of a crowd of awaiting bettors, the patent plow man pushed his way up on the porch.

It looked to the majority of the spectators as if Vaughn had been drinking rather to excess. But there seemed to be no doubt whatever as to Pete Addy's condition as he rolled up the steps in Vaughn's wake.

Addy, to all appearance, was very drunk.

"There zhe man az owns a raz-horse," he hiccoughed, nodding his head at Vaughn.

This sally raised a laugh and nettled Vaughn.

He turned and exclaimed, angrily:

"It's as good a race-horse as this county affords."

"Yes, the race to-day proved that, didn't it?" was the sarcastic reply.

"The horse wasn't himself to-day," asserted Vaughn. "He was a little short of work, but he'll do better next time."

"Let us hope so," dryly hiccoughed Addy. Vaughn flared up and shouted:

"I could win that Derby with him if I entered him."

"Well, why don't you? The entries are not closed. You enter him, and I'll enter the one I have borrowed from Uncle Mory. Then I'll beat you with that skate."

"Do you mean it?"

"I do for a fact. Why, either of old Weed's cripples could beat that goat of yours."

"Eh, what's that?" snorted Nick, who stood near by, and was ready to clinch his opportunity.

"You heard what I said, old man," started Addy. "You an't deaf, I guess."

"No, I an't, an' I an't a liar, as some folks are, nuther."

"Who's a liar?"

"Any man as calls my hosses cripples an' says they kin beat 'em with sich critters as you drive, or that plow man, either."

"Well, I say my horse can beat either of your dogs any day in the week."

"I'll bet you a thousand dollars he can't."

"Where'll you get them?"

"Right hur, outen my pocket, blame your skin!" shouted the enraged old farmer, pulling a roll of bills from his pants pocket which made Addy's eyes bulge and pretty nearly threw him off his guard.

"You'll bet me a thousand dollars your horse can beat mine?"

"In the Derby—yes."

"But mine isn't entered."

"Then enter him, darn you."

"You'll put up?"

"Yes, as soon as you shut up an' git down to business."

"I'll do it," said Addy, still keeping up his drunken dissimulation. "Mansfield, enter my horse as a starter in the Derby."

"Then enter mine, too!" shouted Vaughn.

"Both horses will be entered on payment of the fee," said Mansfield, who stood near by.

Vaughn and Addy each displayed large rolls of bills, and the fees were paid.

"Now I'll bet you a thousand also that my horse will beat yours," cried Vaughn, shaking his roll of bills under Addy's nose.

"I'll take it," quickly replied the half-shot partner of Darrell.

"Haw! law!" roared old Weed.

Vaughn scowled at him and asked:

"What are you laughing at, you old fool?"

"Old fool, am I?" spluttered Nick. "Why, if my bay horse couldn't beat that there thing you rid to-day I'll trade him fur a cat."

"Marble you'd like to bet on it."

"Wouldn't I, though?"

"Then I'll go you, too."

"Say," yelled Weed. "Let's make it three-cornered."

"I'm willing," replied Vaughn.

"So am I," assented Addy. "I'll not only make it three-cornered, but three thousand a corner."

"I'll go you."

"Have you that much, old man?" inquired Vaughn, eagerly.

"I'll soon show you," snorted Nick, flashing his roll again. "I didn't sell my farm fur nuthin'."

Some one in the crowd suggested that Weed should be restrained, because he was apparently drunk.

"I guess neither has the advantage over the other in that respect," said Uncle Mory, and thereat a general laugh went up.

The actions of old Weed's son, Josh, were noticed by nearly everybody in the crowd.

The young man, in an undertone, was trying to persuade his father not to bet, but the old man pushed him angrily aside and growled:

"G'long 'way; I guess I'm old enough to know what I'm doin', an' I don't want no advice from a striplin', nuther."

So the money, nine thousand dollars, was placed in Uncle Mory's hands as the stakeholder, and he was authorized to pay it over to the man whose horse beat the horses of the other two in the Derby next day.

"But mind you, gentlemen," spoke up the pool-seller, "the horse which beats the other two must be among the first three at the finish, else the bet is off. That's the rule of the track on horse-and-horse betting. Is it a go?"

To the general surprise, all three men answered in chorus:

"It's a go."

Then another laugh went up, and some one shouted:

"It's a bluff, after all, then. Neither horse has a chance to be one, two, three."

"I'll bet you a thousand one of 'em will," yelled Addy.

But this time his intended victim had no money.

Then came the auction pools in which Duke sold favorite with three or four well-backed second and third choices. Addy and Durrell bought their horse in every pool for a small sum, but Vaughn left the crowd before the sale began.

Nick and Addy noticed, however, that his horse had a purchaser invariably in one of the strangers.

Nick let the first pool go by, and his entry sold in the field.

Then Addy taunted him with the remark:

"Got enough, have you? Don't think your nag has a show, eh? Well, there's where you are wise."

"Oh, I guess I'm game as you are, and I've got a little money left yit. But I can't beat a hoss like Duke, and I'm not so drunk 'at I'd throw money away, even if it is in five-dollar bills."

It was late before the crowd finally dwindled away, and past midnight when Nick and Chick retired.

Patsy didn't go to bed.

He betook himself to the barn early in the evening, to stand watch all night over Culpepper.

Nick couldn't afford to take a single chance of anybody tampering with the old racer.

Clem, the colored jockey, was stowed away in an attic room, and for the sake of precaution, Nick locked the stair door leading thereto.

"In the morning I'll give you your instructions about riding Culpepper in the Derby," were Nick's parting words.

Day was just breaking when Nick was aroused by a hand on his shoulder.

In an instant he was wide awake.

Patsy stood over him with a finger pressed significantly to his lips.

"What's wrong, lad?"

"Get up, dress as noiselessly as you can, and go with me to the barn."

Nick complied without uttering a syllable more.

Silently they left the house and made their way to the barn. There, seated on a box in the feed-room, Nick saw the form of a girl.

"Who is this?" he asked, peering at her through the dim light.

"I am Miss Durrell," came the reply, in a sweet, childish voice. "Are you Mr. Weed?"

"Yes. What can I do for you?" asked Nick, as he recognized Tiny Durrell's slight form.

"Nothing. But probably I can do you a service."

"Will you explain?"

"As quickly as I can. You are about to be betrayed."

"What? Betrayed? By whom?"

"By the colored boy whom you have brought here to ride Culpepper in the Derby," was the reply which almost took Nick Carter's breath away.

CHAPTER IX.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR RIDING CULPEPPER.

"How do you know that my horse's name is Culpepper?" asked Nick Carter, as soon as he partly recovered from the astonishment which Miss Durrell's words caused.

"From the lips of the boy Clem himself."

"When?"

"Not three hours ago."

"Where?"

"Near my father's house."

"He did not give the information to you direct?"

"No. I overheard what he said to another."

"Ah! To Pete Addy?"

"Yes. As luck would have it, I was awake—was not in the house at the time."

"I know your secret, Miss Durrell, and respect it. You are about to do me a service, and believe me when I tell you that, in return for that service, I promise to bring about that which will not make it necessary for you to be abroad so late at night to be in Lester Tate's company."

She rose from her seat on the box, drew up her slight form, and was ready to retort angrily, when Nick said:

"I am not only your friend, but the best friend Lizzie Barry has in the world at this time. When I tell you that your discovery to-night will probably save Lizzie's father from ruin, you will not resent my haste to make you know I understand your trials and awkward affair of the heart."

"Well, I suppose I must overlook it."

"Do. Now tell me—that colored boy has sold me out to Addy?"

"Yes."

"He is to pull Culpepper to make him lose the race?"

"Yes. Then you knew already?"

"No, I knew or even suspected nothing till you told me the boy and Addy had been in secret conversation."

"After that it is easy to know what the result of their conference was."

"Well, you have stated the case exactly. Addy gave the boy one hundred dollars to-night and will give him five hundred dollars more after the race."

"How did they meet?"

"By arrangement. As I understood it, the appointment was made by the boy at the Blue Lion during the evening for two o'clock."

"And Addy knew nothing about what the boy wanted?"

"I think not. The lad's information seemed to almost strike Addy dumb at first."

"What was the information?"

"First, that your horse is a good race-horse known as Culpepper, with a record of a mile at 1.41."

"Second, that he has been sent here by Culpepper's owner to ride the horse in this race and keep mum."

"He says Culpepper's owner told him that before he sent the boy on?" exclaimed Nick, in surprise.

"No. Only that Culpepper's owner sent him to ride a horse for you; that he recognized the horse as soon as he saw it, and that you cautioned him not to talk."

"He was at the Blue Lion to-night when you made some bets with Addy, and knowing that Addy had been trapped, he saw a chance of making some money by selling out."

"The appointment followed, and Addy readily agreed to the boy's terms. I hate Addy, and would do anything to beat him. So I waited till the boy was safely here, when I walked across to warn you. Your young man here, heard me and intercepted my approach."

"You don't know what a service you have rendered me, Miss Durrell."

"How will it help you, if the boy is not to be trusted to ride? He says your horse cannot carry over a hundred pounds and go the distance."

"That is true. He must have a very light jockey, and a good rider at that."

"I don't know where you'll get one around here. And I do want you to beat Addy."

"You have no friendly feeling for the man, I infer."

"I hate him!" She almost hissed the words from her pretty lips.

"You would brave a great deal, then, to bring him to his ruin's end and rescue your father from his evil influences?"

"I would do almost anything to accomplish such an end."

"Then, Miss Durrell, I think Peter Addy's time of punishment has come."

"I don't understand how."

"Listen, and I'll tell you."

Nick sent Patsy to the outside to watch and see that no one came within reach of the sound of their voices.

Then, dropping their voices, the detective and Tiny Durrell talked rapidly and earnestly to each other for fifteen minutes.

At first the girl's voice seemed to be raised slightly in dissent, but Nick's earnest words soon had a winning effect.

As the girl finally took her leave, she said to Nick Carter, giving him one of her small, white hands:

"I only hope your plan will go through all right, Mr. Weed, but it carries a desperate risk."

"There is nothing gained in this world, Miss Durrell, without risk and daring. If the plan I laid before you is followed to the letter, there will be no failure," was the cheerful response.

In the early morning light Tiny Durrell hastened home, and Nick Carter, leaving Patsy at the barn on guard, made his way to the house, being careful to keep on the side opposite to the single window which gave light and air to the attic room where Clem was supposed to be sleeping.

"How in thunder did the darky get down and up through that window?" muttered Nick. "It's fully twenty feet from the ground. He had a rope of some kind. I was not careful enough. The boy should never have been allowed out of the sight of Chick or Patsy for ten minutes at a time after his arrival."

"However, I'm not so sure but everything will turn out all the better, after all."

"It's time the boy was up, anyhow,"

thought Nick, as he entered the house and awakened Chick; "so I'll just go up to his attic and give him his final instructions."

There was a grim smile on the detective's face as he began to ascend the attic stairs.

Clem was found asleep. It was not a pretense. The lad was making up for his late hours with Addy, and the snore with which he greeted Nick was Nature's own.

Only with the most vigorous shaking did Nick succeed in getting the lad awake enough to realize what was going on.

"Come! come, boy!" said Nick, as, with a final jerk, he succeeded in making Clem open his eyes. "It's time to get up. I want to give you your final instructions about riding that hoss to-day."

"Ya-as, sah!" exclaimed Clem, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. "I'se done sleep purty sound in the airly mownin', but I'se awake now. Ya-as, sah. 'Bout ridin' dat hoss, Massa Weed?"

"Now you're shoutin'," said Nick, as soon as he was sure Clem knew what he was about. "I've changed my mind about that thar race since yisterday."

"Good lar! Yer don't mean I'm not ter ride the critter?"

"Oh, you're to ride him. That's all right. But you're to see that he don't win."

"Not to win?" gasped Clem, with his eyes showing more white than ever. "Golly! Massa Weed, yer not gone clean crazy, are yer?"

"Not by a jugful! But I've made other arrangements. Gone into partnership with Pete Addy, an' I want ye to pull the liver out o' old Culpepper."

"What?" almost yelled the astonished and mystified darky. "Ole Culpeppah! You know—I don't—wha—wha—yer mean?" stammered the boy.

"What do I mean?" repeated Nick, gravely. "Why, jest what I say. Yer to pull the

head off old Culpepper and see that he don't beat Pete Addy's critter. Gol darn your hard nigger skull! Ain't that plain enough?"

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE DERBY WAS WON.

The largest crowd which ever collected at the Clay County Fair to see the Derby run was on hand that afternoon, and excitement ran high in anticipation.

The fact that three outsiders had bet nine thousand dollars among themselves on the relative merits of their three "plugs" gave additional interest to the race though very few people expected to see either horse finish as good as third, and so very few expected to see the nine thousand dollars claimed by any one man.

More pools were sold on the race before the horses were called to the post. Duke still ruled favorite, though a colt entered as "Dare Devil" was in much greater demand than he had been the night before.

A tip somehow got out on this "dark horse," and it seemed to be justified by the owner, who didn't tire at bidding his colt in on nearly every pool at a stiff price.

There were a half-dozen horses which each had a following among the bidders, as each was believed to have an outside chance.

Strange as it seemed to the majority, the horses which were in the "inner race," as it had been called, were not allowed to be sold in the field.

Each of the three horses had its buyer in every pool at ridiculously low prices, however.

The average folks hid in Vaughn's horse shed, and Darrell quietly bought a ticket on Addy's entry in every pool; and what created no little talk was the fact that Marshall and Ted, concerned in taking out the tickets on John Weed's big horse, Sport.

Pete Addy did not fail to notice these facts,

and in his secret soul he chuckled at the thought of what a "cinch" he had in the great game of the afternoon.

But in his greed to make a small fortune out of what he believed was the smartest and most daring coup of his somewhat checkered life, he risked every dollar of his ill-gotten gains which he had in the world.

That afternoon he drew two thousand dollars out of the Charleston bank—all he had left of his deposit there—with the intention of guarding against a possible slip-up as to Vaughn's horse.

Addy had every reason to believe that the disguised Hamlet could beat Vaughn's "ringer." But there was a bare chance that the latter animal might race better than his previous record showed.

So, having a sure thing on Culpepper, through the dishonest jockey, he concluded it would be best to "cinch" the day by a safety bet with Weed.

He rightfully argued that Weed would probably have plenty of cash to put into the game, and that the three thousand dollars already up had probably not exhausted the old man's roll.

Therefore he purposely ran against the old farmer half an hour before the time for the race, and greeted the latter with:

"Hello, old haystack! Still think your horse will beat mine, eh?"

"Ef I didn't, b'gosh, I'd shoot him in his stall," was the aggravating reply.

"Well, maybe you've got some more money that talks just as bravely."

"Guess I've got as much money to talk as you have," saucily replied the old man.

"Then I'll bet you two thousand dollars more, my horse against yours," eagerly cried Addy, producing the money.

"I'm your huckleberry," came the game response, as Weed produced his roll, which seemed to have swelled since the night

fore. "I'll make it five thousand if you want," added Nick, after he had counted off two thousand dollars and held the bulk of the roll undisturbed."

"No, guess I've had enough," muttered Addy, with a scowl. "I don't want to rob you."

"Don't git good all at once, young feller," sneered Weed. "When you rob Silas Weed you'll have to chloroform him fust, I guess."

The additional four thousand dollars were deposited with the pool-seller, and two tickets, "horse against horse," issued therefor to the bettors.

Amid great excitement the horses were summoned to the post for the Derby.

There was a tip-toe excitement prevailing to see what riders were up on the various horses.

Nearly every boy in the vicinity who was accounted a good rider had a "mount," though in several instances men were in the saddle with their one hundred and fifty and one hundred and sixty pounds each.

There was a murmur of surprise when Vaughn's small horse was observed with its jockey—not the large, ungainly patent plow man himself, but his fourteen-year-old boy, who certainly didn't weigh over eighty pounds.

Instantly there went up a murmur in the crowd:

"It's a trick!"

"Addy and old Weed are up against it this time."

Nobody seemed to consider the chances of Duke or Dare Devil jeopardized at all by Vaughn's horse, as the race of the day before was still fresh in mind.

First of the three horses to appear was Addy's, with Pete himself in the saddle.

He wore a regular jockey suit, and it took but a glance to show that the man was scarcely more than a boy in physical build.

He could probably ride at a hundred pounds, and he sat his horse like a Doggett or a Taral.

Another murmur of surprise shook the crowd.

"Now old Weed is a goner. He can't beat both horses."

"See how Addy's horse carries himself."

"By Jove! but the nag looks well."

"Pete Addy isn't anybody's fool. I've always said so."

"What horse is that?"

"The one with the little nigger riding?"

"Why, thunderation! that's old Weed's bay horse."

"Where'd he get the nigger to ride?"

"Don't know. I've seen the boy hanging around several days."

"A stranger?"

"Yes. No one ever saw him before. Old Weed picked him up and set him to work."

"Say! the boy looks like a born rider."

"Well, the old horse don't handle himself badly, either. I like the swing to his canter."

"Didn't it strike you as strange to see Mansfield and Tate buying that horse in the pools?"

"Yes, it did. And now, come to think of it, Mansfield has been with the Weeds a good deal during the last ten days."

"Just so, and Tate is Mansfield's friend."

"By the Lord Harry! there's something going on here which the people don't suspect. It's my opinion we're going to see a horse race where neither Duke nor Dare Devil will be in it."

And this same kind of conversation prevailed throughout the vast throng which was struggling for places of vantage around the track.

As Addy passed Clem on the way to the post, he rode close enough to the latter to say, in a low tone, heard only by the boy:

"Now, mind you, no treachery! Five hundred dollars more are yours to-night if you do your duty. But if you prove false, I'll kill you on the spot as surely as you have wool on your head."

Without looking at the boy, he heard the reply:

"Don't hab no fears. I knows what I'm on dis yer hoss for."

* * * * *

"They're off!" went up the mighty shout, as the red flag of the starter fell.

It was a prompt and good start.

The horses had lined up clear across the wide track like a company of cavalry, and at the word "Now!" from the starter, every one of them moved forward.

Without a moment's hesitation the starter dropped his flag, noticing that the field was moving in a line twenty feet before they reached him.

It was only for a few moments, however, that this order was maintained. Then class and jockeyship told.

As the grand-stand was reached three horses were thundering in the lead breast to breast close to the rail.

The rest had already strung out behind.

The three horses were Duke, Dare Devil, and Vaughn's Basil.

The latter had come across from the outside and joined the two fugitives.

A length behind, leading the rear bunch, came Addy, with a steady pull on his horse, which was going well.

At his crupper was the head of Culpepper, whose mouth was open and almost against his breast under the strength of the whip the colored boy was taking on him.

All the other horses were being hard ridden.

This order was maintained to the first turn, where Vaughn's Basil went into the lead.

His pace was so fast that the jockeys on

Duke and Dare Devil grew uneasy and began to ride their mounts.

Strange to say, Addy remained in striking distance of the three leaders, and was sitting as straight as an arrow on Hamlet, who was going as easily as a steam engine.

And at Hamlet's heels thundered old Weed's bay horse, with his head still close in against his breast and Clem pulling with all his boy strength on the reins.

The rest were out of it, and were spread-eagling behind.

A mighty murmur arose from the great crowd.

There weren't a thousand men in the multitude around that track who had not grasped the situation before the five leaders swept around the far turn.

The side betting between Vaughn and Weed didn't look so absurd as it looked the night before at the Blue Lion.

Each man had rung in a "dark horse."

That was evident to the most stupid of the spectators.

What was more, it began to dawn upon that crowd that Duke and Dare Devil were already beaten.

One of the dark horses would win; but which?

Swinging into the back stretch Vaughn's Basil still led by a length, with Duke and Dare Devil neck and neck, and Hamlet and Culpepper maintaining their respective positions.

Just before the turn into the stretch the rider of Duke began to whip, and the cry went up:

"Duke is beaten!"

So he was.

The winner of last year's Derby was all out, and couldn't respond to the punishment.

The pace had been too hot for him, and he gradually dropped back, beaten.

Dare Devil, however, doggedly held on, and they entered the stretch in this order.

Basil led by an open length; Dare Devil, gamely responding to whip and spur, held on to second position. A length further behind came Hamlet, with Addy sitting still in the saddle, and Culpepper, hard held, maintaining his place of attendance.

The rest were twenty lengths behind in a cloud of dust.

Once straightened out, Vaughn's boy, acting under orders, no doubt, gave his horse the rein and began to ride, intending to take no more chances.

That settled Dare Devil, who went to the rear very rapidly.

But Basil was not to win so easily.

Hamlet and Culpepper came thundering at his heels, and at the last sixteenth pole both were gaining rapidly, while Vaughn's boy was whipping viciously.

Basil responded in a measure, which caused Addy to draw his whip, and in a few moments Hamlet had shot ahead of the fast tiring Basil.

Within forty lengths of the wire Hamlet was three lengths in front of Basil and the same distance ahead of Culpepper, who, to everybody's astonishment, was still fighting for his head.

The crowd began to cry "Fraud! fraud!" "Let him out!" and kindred expressions.

Addy had put up his whip after having looked over his shoulder and noticed Clem's grasp upon Culpepper's reins.

There was a devilish smile on his face, and victory, which was worth at least ten thousand dollars to him, was within a few seconds' grasp of his panting horse.

When almost within the shadow of the judges' stand, he was startled by a roar from the great crowd pressing around the track.

The roar of human voices was so great that he didn't hear the thunder of Culpepper's feet at his saddle girths.

But some premonition of what the shout meant caused him to look over his shoulder.

What he saw caused every drop of blood to chill in his rascally veins.

Culpepper at last had the freedom of his head, while his rider was leaning over his neck clucking words of encouragement into his ear.

And the mighty burst of speed which Culpepper showed in that last hundred feet no one ever forgot who was there to see.

Before Addy could again draw his whip upon Hamlet, the old racer went past like a shot and crossed the line with daylight between his tail and Hamlet's nose.

The confusion which followed beggared description.

As the rider of Culpepper dismounted, Addy rushed around from the opposite side of Hamlet and made at the boy with the butt of his whip upraised, and his face livid with rage.

Clem stood with his back to the judges' stand and to Addy.

Old Weed had just handed the boy a large, wet towel, in which the latter had at once hid his face.

"Curse you, little traitor! I said I'd kill you if——"

Addy's words were checked in his mouth.

He stopped as if he had been struck, his upraised whip suspended in the air.

Clem had turned and faced him, at the same time tearing a curly wig from his head.

Instead of a negro's countenance, he was looking upon a white face, about which long golden ringlets rippled as the woolly wig let them from their restraint.

Addy knew the face in an instant.

"Tiny Durrell!" he gasped.

Old Weed answered for her.

"An' a better rider of a hoss never sat in a saddle, uther, ef I do say so. She rides to order, too, every time."

"Furies! What does this mean?" called Addy, as the crowd gathered around.

Nick, who had thrown a large duster around Tiny's form to hide her from the eyes of the gaping spectators, coolly replied:

"It means, Pete Addy, *alias* Dug Reagan, the outlawed jockey, that, thanks to the heroic sacrifice of this little lady, your plot has failed. It was one rascal against another, and I've bagged you both!"

"And who the devil are you?" shrieked Addy, something of the truth dawning on his mind.

"I'm Nick Carter, the detective, at your service," was the calm reply; "and I want you to answer to the charge of horse-stealing."

"Horse-stealing?" gasped Addy, turning pale. "What do you mean?"

"Bring him forward, Chick," called Nick.

Thereupon the young man known in Charleston as Josh Weed came forward, leading a stranger, who had handcuffs on his wrists.

At sight of the latter, Addy made a dart for the crowd.

But Nick's hand was on his collar, and he, too, had the bracelets fastened to his wrists in another instant.

The other prisoner was the same man who had sold Hamlet to Uncle Mory. He returned that morning to be on hand so as to receive his share of the "swag." Mory had recognized him, and Nick took the fellow into custody.

He turned out to be a race-track pal of Addy's, *alias* Dug Reagan, the notorious ruled-off jockey.

The latter's identity had been disclosed to Nick by Clem after the latter was confronted with his treachery by Nick in the attic.

Clem had recognized Reagan in the person of Addy at the Blue Lion the night before. Knowing Reagan's character, and suspecting that he had some game in hand, he sought the midnight interview with the latter, got in and

out of his attic by making a rope of some sheets, and disclosed the fact that Nick's bay horse was the famous Culpepper.

Vaughn and his following of fakirs disappeared, leaving their "ringer" behind in the haste of their flight.

Addy refused to tell how he first learned of Vaughn's intentions to "cinch" the Clay County Derby. But he confessed that he heard of Hamlet's merits by eavesdropping when Tate told the secret to Tiny. But that he did learn of Vaughn's plot nearly a year before and go to Charleston for the purpose of "countering" on it he fully admitted.

"And if it hadn't been for that cursed imp—old Durrell's daughter—I'd have got away with Vaughn and you, too," he said to Nick, as he started with his companion in crime for the penitentiary, a month later, to serve out a ten-years' term.

When Yates Durrell learned the manner of man in whose power he had been, he fully forgave his daughter for the part she had taken in rescuing him.

Nick's guess was right. Durrell had no suspicion that Hamlet was a stolen horse, or at least that Addy knew it.

Addy pretended to have discovered the horse's speed by accident one day while they were in the country electioneering, and had tempted Durrell with the plan for "cinching" the Derby.

Nick Carter took possession of the eight thousand dollars he won from Vaughn and Addy, as well as his own five thousand, and the two thousand dollars stake.

Of course, he and Mansfield and Tate held nearly every winning pool-ticket on the Derby, and they called for many thousands of dollars.

Mansfield and Tate had bought these tickets for him at his request.

But he refused to take the money. He ordered the pool-seller to refund all the money

in the box except that which Vaughn and Addy paid in, to the parties who bet it.

This was done, and by general agreement the last Derby of the Clay County Fair went into history.

Nick not only turned over to John Barry his race-horse, Hamlet, but also five thousand dollars besides.

Of the remaining three thousand he presented Lizzie Barry with one, and Tiny Durrell with another as wedding dowers, keeping one thousand himself to pay for his time "at the fair." The stake went to Culpepper's owner.

He and Chick both attended the wedding whereby Parke Mansfield and Lester Tate won charming brides.

After the double ceremony, Chick plucked Nick by the sleeve and whispered, roguishly:

"I say, Nick, speaking of lead-pipe cinches, Tate has one. If that little lady holds the reins on him as tight as she did on old Culpepper, he won't be in it."

THE END.

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